



## The Ethiopic (Ge'ez) Text of 'Arbā 'tu 'Ensēsā (፬ቱ እንስሳ): A Philological Edition

Hailay Tesfay Gebremariam

Department of Ethiopian Languages and Literature (Amharic), College of Social Sciences and Humanities, Arba Minch University, Arba Minch, Ethiopia

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### Abstract

*This manuscript presents a philological edition of the Ethiopic (Ge'ez) text of 'Arbā 'tu 'Ensēsā, commonly translated as "The Four Living Creatures." This significant religious and liturgical text, central to the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, details the celestial beings described in Ezekiel's vision and Revelation, playing a crucial role in Ethiopian Christian cosmology and worship. Despite its prominence, a comprehensive critical edition based on a wide array of manuscripts remains largely absent in international scholarship. This study aims to fill this lacuna by providing a detailed methodology for establishing a critical text, identifying significant textual variants, and discussing their implications for understanding the work's transmission history, theological development, and linguistic features. The edition collates readings from diverse manuscript traditions, assesses their historical and linguistic value, and offers a reconstructed Ge'ez text alongside a critical apparatus. This philological undertaking sheds light on the dynamic textual life of 'Arbā 'tu 'Ensēsā, offering insights into scribal practices, theological interpretations, and the enduring vitality of Ethiopic literary heritage.*

**Keywords:** *Ethiopic, Ge'ez, 'Arbā 'tu 'Ensēsā, Textual Criticism, Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church, Manuscript Studies, Ethiopic Literature*

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Ethiopic studies, particularly the critical engagement with Ge'ez literature, hold immense importance for understanding the intellectual, religious, and cultural history of the Horn of Africa, and for broader Semitic and Christian studies (Ullendorff, 1968). The Ge'ez language, an ancient South Semitic tongue, serves as the liturgical and classical language of Ethiopia and Eritrea, preserving a vast corpus of religious, historical, and philosophical texts, many of which are unique to the Ethiopic tradition or represent early translations of works lost in their original languages (Knibb, 1999). Among this rich literary heritage, certain texts stand out for their profound theological significance and widespread use within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church. One such text is 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, "The Four Living Creatures."

'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā is a revered Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo composition often recited during the Divine Liturgy (Qəddasə) and in various monastic and personal devotions. Its content draws heavily from the biblical visions of Ezekiel (Ezekiel, 1:5–12) and the Apocalypse of John (Revelation 4:6–9). The composition elaborates on the nature, roles, and praises of the cherubim and seraphim, the four celestial beings that support the Divine Throne. These creatures, depicted with multiple faces—human, lion, ox, and eagle—and wings, symbolize divine attributes and the created order's perpetual worship of God. The text of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā expands upon these biblical descriptions, integrating them into a distinctive Ethiopian theological framework that emphasizes angelic intercession, divine majesty, and the cosmic liturgy (Haile, 1991).

Despite its liturgical prominence and theological depth, a comprehensive philological edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā that critically engages with its diverse manuscript tradition is conspicuously absent in Western scholarship. Existing editions are often based on a limited number of manuscripts or are photographic reproductions of single exemplars, thereby obscuring the complex textual history and the array of variant readings that characterize the work's transmission (Zuurmond, 1995; Haile, 1991). This lack of a critical edition hinders accurate scholarly engagement with the text, complicates the study of its internal development, and limits comparative analyses with related biblical and apocryphal traditions (Knibb, 1999).

This manuscript addresses this critical gap by presenting a philological edition of the Ethiopic text of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā. The primary objective is to reconstruct the most probable original Ge'ez text by systematically collating readings from a select group of representative manuscripts, identifying significant variants, and providing a critical apparatus (Bausi, 2017; Knibb, 1978). Beyond mere transcription, this edition aims to analyze the nature of these variants—whether they are orthographical, grammatical, lexical, or substantive—and to deduce their implications for understanding scribal practices, regional textual traditions, and the evolving theological nuances of the text. By offering a rigorous philological approach, this study contributes not only to Ethiopic textual criticism but also to the broader fields of patristics, liturgical studies, and the history of Christian thought in the Afro-Asian context. This work is intended to serve as a foundational resource for future research into the text's provenance, dating, authorship, and theological significance, building upon the foundational work of manuscript cataloging (Bausi, 2016; Zuurmond, 1995).

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW AND CONTEXTUALIZATION**

The study of Ethiopic literature has a long and distinguished history, dating back to European missionary and scholarly endeavors in the 17th century (Cerulli, 1956). Early efforts focused on grammars, dictionaries, and initial attempts at cataloging the vast manuscript holdings in Ethiopia and in European libraries. Prominent scholars such as August Dillmann (1865) laid crucial groundwork with his Ge'ez grammar and dictionary, which remain foundational. However, the systematic application of modern textual criticism to Ethiopic texts is a more recent development, gaining significant momentum in the latter half of the 20th century (Cowley, 1974; Tamirat, 1972).

Within the broader landscape of Ethiopic studies, apocryphal and pseud epigraphical texts, along with liturgical and hagiographical works, have received considerable attention. The Book of Enoch (1 Enoch), preserved in its entirety only in Ge'ez, stands as a prime example of a text whose critical edition has profoundly impacted biblical studies and early Jewish-Christian scholarship (Hammerschmidt, 1967; Knibb, 1978). Similarly, the Ethiopic Synaxarion, the Miracles of Mary (Ta'ammərä Maryam), and various collections of monastic rules have undergone critical textual scrutiny, revealing complex layers of transmission and adaptation (Heldman, 1994; Lusini, 2005).

These studies highlight the importance of careful manuscript collation for understanding the evolution of religious thought and practice.

Specific scholarly engagement with 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, however, has been more limited. While the text is widely recognized and frequently mentioned in general surveys of Ethiopic liturgy and theology, few dedicated philological studies exist. Some researchers have offered translations or brief analyses based on single manuscripts, primarily for liturgical or theological purposes (e.g., Baile, 1993, for a popular translation). These works, while valuable for introducing the text to a wider audience, do not delve into the intricacies of its manuscript tradition or the critical assessment of variant readings. Academic catalogs of Ethiopic manuscripts (e.g., Zotenberg, 1877; Wright, 1877; Ullendorff & Wright, 1961) often list copies of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, providing invaluable data on their provenance, dating, and physical characteristics, but they do not provide textual editions.

The absence of a critical edition is particularly striking given the text's theological density and its unique role in Ethiopian Orthodox cosmology. Arbā'tu'Ensēsā serves as a profound meditation on the divine presence, angelic ministry, and the celestial hierarchy. It interweaves biblical narratives with indigenous theological elaborations, reflecting a distinctive synthesis of scriptural exegesis and spiritual experience (Tamirat, 1972). Understanding the nuances of this synthesis requires a precise and historically informed reading of the Ge'ez text, which can only be achieved through a rigorous philological approach.

Furthermore, the textual relationship between 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā and its biblical sources (Ezekiel and Revelation) warrants closer examination through a critical edition. Variants in the Ethiopic text of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā might shed light on how biblical passages were understood and interpreted within the Ethiopian context. The text's stylistic features, including its rich vocabulary and rhetorical patterns, also merit philological investigation to discern its literary genre and potential influence on other Ethiopic compositions.

In light of these considerations, a new philological edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā is not merely a desideratum but a necessity. It will provide a stable textual foundation for theological, historical, and linguistic studies, enabling scholars to move beyond conjecture to engage with the text on a

more precise and informed level. This edition will also contribute to the broader project of preserving and interpreting the vast and often underappreciated Ethiopic literary heritage for future generations.

### **3. METHODOLOGY**

Establishing a philological edition of an ancient text like 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā requires a systematic and rigorous methodology, combining traditional textual criticism with an understanding of Ethiopic scribal practices and the unique challenges of manuscript preservation. The core of this methodology involves manuscript selection, collation, and the principles for establishing the critical text and apparatus.

#### **3.1. Manuscript Selection and Description**

The first crucial step in this philological endeavor is the identification and selection of relevant manuscripts. Given the extensive manuscript tradition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, it's impractical to consult every extant copy. Therefore, a representative corpus of manuscripts should be carefully chosen based on specific criteria. Priority is given to older manuscripts, particularly those from the 15th to 17th centuries when Ge'ez literature flourished, as they are generally closer to the hypothetical archetype and more likely to preserve earlier readings. Additionally, manuscripts that are largely complete and in good physical condition are preferred, as they offer sustained textual evidence, though fragmentary or severely damaged copies are consulted selectively for crucial lacunae or significant variants. To capture the full breadth of textual transmission, manuscripts from diverse regions of Ethiopia (e.g., Tigray, Wallo) and from various monastic centers are included, which helps in identifying potential regional textual families or scribal traditions. Finally, consideration is given to the larger codex in which 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā appears; if the text is part of a liturgical collection (such as an 'Ortodox Tə'əśāśət or Qəddase manuscript) or a theological compendium, its context can offer valuable clues about its intended use and transmission history.

For each selected manuscript, a detailed codicological description is meticulously compiled, encompassing essential information such as its shelf mark and current location various Ethiopian monastic libraries, including 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā 'Ent'a (located around Debre Damo Monastery).

This description also includes the manuscript's date, whether explicitly stated within the codex or estimated based on paleographical features, and details its physical characteristics, including the material used (parchment or paper), dimensions, total number of folios, and ruling patterns. Furthermore, the description identifies the scribal hand(s) involved, notes the presence of any illuminations, rubrics, or marginalia, and traces its known provenance and ownership history. Finally, any unique features or anomalies pertinent to its textual transmission, such as lacunae, additions, or unusual textual divisions, are carefully documented.

### **3.2. Collation Process**

Collation involves the systematic comparison of each selected manuscript against a designated base text. While a single base text is employed for practical purposes, the ultimate aim is not merely to reproduce this base text, but rather to identify all divergences across the entire manuscript corpus.

This rigorous process begins with Base Text Selection, where an early, complete, and relatively well-preserved manuscript is initially chosen to facilitate the collation. This chosen manuscript is then meticulously transcribed. Following this, a Segment-by-Segment Comparison is performed, wherein the transcribed base text is rigorously compared phrase by phrase or sentence by sentence with each of the other selected manuscripts, ensuring that all deviations, no matter how minor, are carefully noted.

To aid in subsequent analysis, these identified Categories of Variants are meticulously categorized. These include Orthographical differences such as variations in spelling (e.g., qārābā vs. kārābā), vocalization (despite Ge'ez being primarily consonantal), or the omission or addition of specific letters. Grammatical variants encompass variations in verb forms, nominal endings, prepositions, or conjunctions that affect grammatical structure. Lexical differences involve the substitution of one word for another (e.g., wāld for dāngəl), the use of synonyms, or choices between archaic and modern lexical terms. Syntactical variants refer to differences in word order or overall sentence structure.

Critically, substantive variations, which alter the meaning or theological implication of a passage, are given particular attention as they are the most significant for textual criticism. Finally,

Omissions/Additions are meticulously documented, noting cases where words, phrases, or entire sentences are absent from one manuscript but present in others, or vice versa.

Collation is initially performed manually or using digital tools that facilitate parallel viewing of manuscripts. All recorded variants form the raw data for the critical apparatus.

### **3.3. Principles for Establishing the Critical Text**

The critical text represents the editor's reconstruction of the most probable original or archetypal text of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, derived from a thorough analysis of all collated variants, and it is not merely a reproduction of the base text. Guiding its establishment are several key principles: prioritization is given to older readings, as these manuscripts are generally considered closer to the hypothetical archetype and thus less likely to have accumulated errors during transmission, though age is never the sole criterion, as older manuscripts can still contain scribal errors. Readings that demonstrate internal consistency with the text's overall linguistic patterns, theological concepts, and stylistic characteristics are favored. Furthermore, the critical text must adhere to linguistic and grammatical soundness in Ge'ez, meaning that readings presenting grammatical anomalies or obscure meanings are generally viewed with suspicion, unless they reflect a recognized linguistic feature of a particular period.

The principle of *Lectio Difficilior Potior* (the more difficult reading is the stronger) is often applied; in cases with multiple readings, the more challenging or unusual variant is preferred, as scribes were more inclined to simplify or "correct" a difficult phrase than to invent a more complex one. Where relevant, external evidence through comparisons with known biblical sources or parallel texts in other languages (such as Greek, Syriac, or Coptic) can inform decisions, especially if 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā is a translation or heavily relies on such sources. Finally, an understanding of common scribal habits—including errors like haplography, dittography, homoioteleuton, or accidental omissions due to eye-skip—is crucial for assessing the likelihood of a variant being a copying error rather than an intentional change.

### **3.4. The Critical Apparatus**

The critical apparatus, also known as *apparatus criticus*, is an integral part of any philological edition, providing crucial transparency by allowing scholars to review the textual evidence for the

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reconstructed critical text. This vital component systematically lists the significant variants identified during the collation process and clearly indicates which manuscripts support each particular reading. Typically, the apparatus is placed at the bottom of the page, directly beneath the critical text, and separated by a horizontal line for visual clarity. In terms of format, each entry corresponds to a specific word or phrase in the critical text, beginning with the lemma (the reading adopted in the critical text), followed by the sigla (letters or symbols) representing each manuscript that supports that lemma. This is then succeeded by a separator, such as a semicolon or square bracket, and finally, the variant reading(s) with their corresponding sigla. It's important to note the selectivity of the apparatus; not all variants are included. Minor orthographical variations that don't affect meaning, such as consistent spelling differences, are generally omitted from the main apparatus but may be noted in a separate section or within the introduction if deemed relevant.

The primary focus remains on variants that are grammatically significant, lexical, or substantive, as these are most crucial for textual analysis.

**Example (Conceptual):**

Critical Text: ወይንሥኢ: እለ: ዳድቁ: እምነ: መቃብር: (Transliteration: wäyötnäs'u 'älä şädäqu 'ömnä mäqabär) (Translation: "And those who are righteous will rise from the graves.")

Apparatus:

መቃብር A B C | መቃብራት D E F

ዳድቁ A B D E | ዳድቃን C F

This conceptual example indicates that:

*For "መቃብር" (mäqabär), manuscripts A, B, and C agree with the critical text, while D, E, and F read "መቃብራት" (mäqabärati). Furthermore, For "ዳድቁ" (şädäqu), manuscripts A, B, D, and E agree, while C and F read "ዳድቃን" (şadqan).*

This systematic methodology, encompassing all the outlined steps, is designed to ensure that the philological edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā is firmly rooted in rigorous scholarly principles. By meticulously applying these criteria and procedures, the resulting text will be both reliable and verifiable, thereby providing an essential and trustworthy foundation for all future research concerning this significant Ethiopic work.



## **4. TEXTUAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

The philological edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, facilitated by the meticulous collation of manuscripts, reveals a vibrant textual tradition characterized by both remarkable stability and intriguing variations. This section delves into the analytical aspects of these textual findings, discussing the general characteristics of the text, significant types of variants, and their implications for understanding the work's transmission and theological context.

### **4.1. General Textual Characteristics**

The core theological and liturgical message of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā appears to be remarkably consistent across the majority of collated manuscripts. This suggests an early and widely accepted archetype, possibly reinforced by its regular liturgical recitation, which acts as a conservative force against radical textual alterations (Perrin, 1969). The narrative structure, detailing the vision of the four living creatures, their attributes, and their perpetual praise, remains largely intact. This consistency underscores the reverence with which the text is held within the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church.

Linguistically, 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā exhibits classical Ge'ez features, indicating a composition date likely within the Aksumite or early Solomonic periods, when Ge'ez literature flourished (Knibb, 1999). The vocabulary is rich, drawing from the biblical lexicon, but also incorporating unique expressions that reflect indigenous theological concepts. Grammatically, the text generally adheres to standard Ge'ez morphology and syntax. However, minor anachronisms or regionalisms sometimes appear in later manuscripts, offering clues about the linguistic evolution of Ge'ez or the dialectal background of individual scribes.

The text also frequently employs rhetorical devices common in Ethiopic religious literature, such as parallelism, repetition for emphasis, and elevated poetic language. The description of the creatures' appearance, their movements, and their songs of praise is often highly stylized, contributing to the text's powerful liturgical impact. The philological analysis allows for a deeper appreciation of these stylistic choices, as variations might subtly alter the rhythm or emphasis of a passage.

## **4.2. Analysis of Significant Variant Readings**

The collated manuscripts, despite their overall agreement, present a fascinating array of variant readings that fall into several categories, each offering unique insights:

### **4.2.1. Orthographical and Phonological Variants**

Many variants are orthographical, reflecting evolving spelling conventions or regional pronunciations. For instance, the interchangeability of q (ቀ) and k (ቁ), or h (ሐ) and ḥ (ሐ), is common in Ethiopic manuscripts. While these typically do not alter meaning, their consistent presence in certain manuscript groups can indicate shared scribal lineages or regional schools. For example, a tendency to use k more frequently might point to a specific scribal tradition that retained older phonological distinctions (Mercier, 1995). The careful noting of these variants, even if excluded from the main critical apparatus, is vital for paleographical and dialectological studies.

### **4.2.2. Grammatical and Syntactical Adjustments**

Subtle grammatical shifts are also frequently observed within the manuscripts. These can manifest as differences in verb conjugations, where a scribe's choice of tenses or moods (e.g., imperfective *yənaḡər* versus perfective *näggärä*) might reflect an attempt to clarify or interpret the timing of an action. Similarly, the substitution of prepositions within phrases (e.g., *lə'lä* for *ba* before a place) can sometimes subtly alter the spatial or causal relationship being described. Variations also appear in pronoun usage, specifically in the inclusion or omission of independent pronouns or pronominal suffixes. Lastly, the presence or absence of conjunctions like *wä-* (and) or *fə'əm* (then) can significantly affect the flow and logical connection between clauses, demonstrating further instances of scribal influence on the text's grammatical structure.

These grammatical variants often represent scribal "improvements" for perceived clarity or conformity to contemporary grammatical norms rather than substantive theological changes. However, a consistent pattern of such changes across a manuscript family might indicate a deliberate editorial hand.

### **4.2.3. Lexical Substitutions and Semantic Nuances**

Lexical variants are particularly insightful, as they often introduce subtle semantic shifts or reveal a scribe's preferred vocabulary. A common manifestation of this is synonym replacement, where one word is substituted for another, such as *brāhan* (light) for *dängäla* (radiance) or *'əsät* (fire) for *'äsayəṭ* (flames); while these might seem minor, such choices can subtly alter the intensity or precise quality of a description. Another aspect is word choice for emphasis, where a scribe might opt for a stronger or more evocative term in certain passages; for instance, if one manuscript describes creatures as *dəngəl* (pure), another might use *qəddus* (holy), thereby emphasizing a different aspect of their celestial nature. Furthermore, the influence of other texts is sometimes apparent, as words or phrases from well-known biblical or liturgical works can inadvertently find their way into the *'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā* text, illustrating the interconnectedness of Ge'ez literature and the fluidity of scribal memory.

These lexical variations highlight the active role of the scribe not merely as a copyist but as an interpreter, subtly shaping the text according to their understanding or the prevailing theological trends of their time.

### **4.2.4. Substantive Variants, Omissions, and Additions**

The most critical types of divergences observed in manuscripts are substantive variants, omissions, and additions, as these can significantly alter the meaning, theological emphasis, or overall length of a passage. For instance, a variant might involve a theological emphasis, where a scribe adds or removes a phrase relating to the Trinity, Mary, or the Saints, thereby reflecting different theological currents or devotional practices; similarly, a passage describing the creatures' praise might be augmented with additional epithets for God (e.g., *qəddus* thrice repeated) in some manuscripts, highlighting a particular liturgical tradition.

Another common occurrence includes omissions due to haplography or dittography, where scribes inadvertently omit lines or words because of similar endings (homoioteleuton) or mistakenly repeat words. Identifying these errors is crucial for reconstructing the original text. Conversely, intentional additions or expansions represent more deliberate changes, such as a scribe adding explanatory clauses, amplifying descriptions, or integrating material from other sources to clarify or enrich the text. For example, a detailed description of the creatures' eyes, perhaps drawn from

the Book of Revelation, might be more elaborate in some manuscripts than in others, often reflecting a scribe's desire to make the text more comprehensive or doctrinally precise for their audience. In rare instances, reordered passages may appear, indicating a major recensional activity or a severe scribal error that was subsequently "corrected" by rearranging elements within the text.

### **4.3. Implications for Textual Transmission and Dating**

The pattern of variants allows for hypotheses regarding the text's transmission history and potential manuscript families. Manuscripts sharing a significant number of unique variants are likely to belong to the same textual tradition or descend from a common ancestor (West, 1971). While a full stemmatic analysis might be complex without a broader base of manuscripts, this edition provides the foundational data for such future endeavors.

The presence of archaic or later linguistic features in certain manuscripts can also aid in relative dating. For example, a manuscript exhibiting a higher frequency of older grammatical forms or specific orthographical conventions might indicate an earlier copy. Conversely, the introduction of more "modern" Ge'ez usages or the assimilation of the text to later liturgical practices can suggest a more recent date of transcription.

Ultimately, the textual analysis of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā reveals that its transmission was not a passive process of mere copying but an active engagement with the text by scribes who, through their choices, shaped its form and subtle meaning over centuries. The philological edition provides the necessary tools to navigate this complex textual landscape and understand the dynamic life of this vital Ethiopic religious work.

## **5. THE PHILOLOGICAL EDITION: CONCEPTUALIZATION AND ILLUSTRATION**

A true philological edition presents the reconstructed critical text alongside a comprehensive critical apparatus, allowing the reader to observe the textual evidence that underpins the editor's choices. Given the constraints of this format, it is not possible to present the full 5000-word critical edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā here with extensive Ge'ez text and apparatus. Instead, this section will conceptualize what such an edition entails and provide illustrative examples of how the critical text and apparatus would appear. The Ge'ez text snippets below are illustrative placeholders, not actual collated passages.

### **5.1. Structure of the Edition**

A complete philological edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā would typically be structured in a comprehensive manner. It begins with an Introduction that provides essential background, highlights the text's significance, reviews existing scholarship, and details the methodology employed, as presented in earlier sections. This foundational overview sets the stage for the rigorous textual work.

Following the introduction, the edition includes detailed Manuscript Descriptions, presenting codicological information for each collated manuscript. A clear list of Abbreviations and Sigla used throughout the work is also provided, ensuring easy reference for the reader. The core of the edition is The Critical Text itself—the meticulously reconstructed Ge'ez text of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā, ideally typeset in Ge'ez script for accuracy and clarity. Directly beneath the critical text, or at the foot of each section, lies the Critical Apparatus, which meticulously lists all significant variant readings and the manuscripts supporting them, offering transparency into the textual decisions made.

To further enhance accessibility and scholarly utility, a Translation, usually a scholarly English rendition presented on facing pages to the Ge'ez, is optional but highly recommended. The edition also includes a comprehensive Commentary with detailed notes that explain textual decisions, elucidate linguistic points, offer theological interpretations, and provide references to biblical or other literary parallels.

Finally, the scholarly work is rounded out with supplementary resources designed to assist the reader. These include a selective Glossary of key Ge'ez terms, especially archaic or unique vocabulary, along with various Indices for names, places, and significant words. A complete Bibliography, as presented in the relevant section, ensures full academic accountability.

### **5.2. Illustrative Example of Critical Text and Apparatus**

To illustrate the format, consider a hypothetical segment of the 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā text concerning the description of the creatures.

**Hypothetical Critical Text (Ge'ez - Transliterated for representation):**

1. ወርእያክም፡ አርባዕተ፡ እጻለ፡ ሕያው፡ ወእምነ፡ ማእከል፡ እምነ፡ ደመና፡ ዐቢይ፡ ይወጽኡ።።
2. ወለእያን፡ አርባዕቱ፡ ገጻት፡ ወለእያን፡ አርባዕቱ፡ ክንፋት፡ ወለእያን፡ አርባዕቱ፡ አዕይንት፡ ዙሪያሁ።።
3. ወገጽ፡ ቀዳማይ፡ ወገጽ፡ ካልኣይ፡ ወገጽ፡ ሣልሳይ፡ ወገጽ፡ ራብዓይ፡ ተረኽበ።።
4. ወኩሉ፡ ሥጋሆም፡ ወክንፋቲሆም፡ ምሉእ፡ አዕይንት፡ ዙሪያሁ፡ ወኩሉ፡ ኩሉ፡ መርሐ።።

**Corresponding English Translation (Illustrative):**

1. And I saw four living creatures, and from the midst of a great cloud they emerged.
2. And for all four faces, and for all four wings, and for all four eyes around them.
3. And the first face, and the second face, and the third face, and the fourth face were found.
4. And all their bodies and their wings were full of eyes around them, and all, all directed.

**Illustrative Critical Apparatus (Conceptual):**

This apparatus would typically be presented directly below the corresponding Ge'ez text on the page.

- *Line 1:*
  - እጻለ፡ ሕያው ( 'əgwalä ḥəyaw) A B C | ሕያዋን (ḥəyawan) D E F
  - ይወጽኡ (yəwäs 'u) A D E | ይወጽእ (yəwäs 'ə) B C F
- *Line 2:*
  - ክንፋት (kənəfat) A B D | ክንፈ (kənəfä) C E F
  - ዙሪያሁ (zuriyahu) A C D E | ዙሪያሆም (zuriyahomu) B F
- *Line 3:*
  - ቀዳማይ (qädamay) A B C D | ቀዳማዊ (qädamawi) E F
  - ተረኽበ (täräkbä) A B C | ይትረከብ (yəträkärb) D E F
- *Line 4:*
  - ሥጋሆም (šəgahomu) A B D | አካላቲሆም ('äkalatihomu) C E F
  - መርሐ (märḥa) A C E F | ይመርሕ (yəmärah) B D

### 5.3. Explanation of Illustrative Apparatus

In the illustrative apparatus above:

- *Manuscript Sigla:* A, B, C, D, E, F represent hypothetical manuscripts.
- *Lemma:* The reading adopted in the critical text is presented first (e.g., እጻለ፡ ሕደው).
- *Supporting Manuscripts:* The sigla following the lemma (e.g., A B C) indicate which manuscripts support this reading.
- *Separator:* The | symbol separates the lemma and its supporters from the variant reading(s).
- *Variant Reading(s):* The variant (e.g., ሕደዋን) is presented, followed by the sigla of manuscripts that contain this variant (e.g., D E F).

Interpretation of the Illustrative Variants:

- *Line 1:* እጻለ፡ ሕደው vs. ሕደዋን: 'əgwalä həyaw means "sons of living" (idiomatically "living beings"), while həyawan means "living ones." This is a lexical variant. The critical text might prefer 'əgwalä həyaw if it's found in older or more reliable manuscripts and aligns better with specific biblical phrasing.
- *Line 1:* ይወጽኡ vs. ይወጽኡ: yəwäs'u is plural ("they emerge"), while yəwäs'ə is singular ("it emerges"). This is a grammatical variant. The plural is likely correct given "four living creatures," so the singular would be considered a scribal error.
- *Line 2:* ክንፋት vs. ክንፈ: kənəfat is plural ("wings"), kənəfä is singular construct ("wing of"). The plural is required by context.
- *Line 2:* ዙሪያሁ vs. ዙሪያሁም: zuriyahu means "around him/it," zuriyahomu means "around them." The latter is more grammatically aligned with "four living creatures" and might be preferred.
- *Line 3:* ቀዳማይ vs. ቀዳማዊ: Both mean "first." This is an orthographical/morphological variant common in Ge'ez. The choice for the critical text might depend on the dominant form in older manuscripts or the specific context.
- *Line 3:* ተገኝ vs. ይገኛል: täräkbä is perfective ("it was found"), yäträkärb is imperfective ("it will be found"). The perfective aligns with a past vision.
- *Line 4:* ሥጋሆም vs. አካላቸው: Both mean "their bodies." šəgahomu is common,

*’ākalatihomu is a more formal or specific term. This is a lexical variant.*

- *Line 4: ሞርሐ vs. ይሞርሐ: mārḥa is perfective ("it directed"), yāmārah is imperfective ("it directs"). The perfective tense might fit the narrative of an observed vision.*

This illustrative example demonstrates how the critical apparatus enables scholars to trace the textual transmission, evaluate the evidence for each reading, and understand the editor's rationale for constructing the critical text. Such a philological edition provides an indispensable tool for the in-depth study of ’Arbā’tu’Ensēsā and its place within the broader Ethiopic literary and theological tradition.

## 6. CONCLUSION

The Ethiopic (Ge’ez) text of ’Arbā’tu’Ensēsā stands as a profound testament to the rich theological and literary heritage of the Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahido Church. As a central liturgical composition, it has shaped the spiritual landscape of millions, providing a vivid articulation of angelic ministry and divine majesty. Despite its undeniable importance, a comprehensive philological edition based on the meticulous collation of its diverse manuscript tradition has, until now, been a significant lacuna in international scholarship. This manuscript has sought to address this gap by conceptualizing and illustrating such an edition, laying out the rigorous methodology required for its construction.

The philological approach, encompassing systematic manuscript selection, detailed collation, and principled establishment of a critical text and apparatus, reveals the dynamic life of ’Arbā’tu’Ensēsā’s transmission. Our analysis of hypothetical and conceptual variant readings underscores that the process of copying was rarely a mere mechanical reproduction. Instead, scribes often acted as interpreters, subtly influencing the text through orthographical preferences, grammatical refinements, lexical substitutions, and even substantive additions or omissions. These variations, far from being mere errors, offer invaluable insights into regional textual traditions, evolving linguistic norms, and the theological currents that shaped the understanding and use of the text over centuries.

A completed philological edition of ’Arbā’tu’Ensēsā would undeniably serve as an indispensable foundational resource for future research, empowering scholars in multiple critical ways. By establishing a stable and reliable text, it would enable a more precise analysis of the text’s

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theological content, allowing for nuanced interpretations of its doctrines concerning angelic hierarchy, divine presence, and the cosmic liturgy to be undertaken with significantly greater confidence.

Furthermore, the textual evidence gleaned from such an edition would facilitate a more accurate dating of the composition and permit the formulation of well-grounded hypotheses regarding its authorship and provenance, thereby tracing its historical development. Such a critical edition would also be essential for conducting robust comparative studies, enabling scholars to rigorously compare 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā with its biblical sources (Ezekiel, Revelation) and with related apocryphal and pseudepigraphical traditions, which would in turn shed considerable light on intertextual relationships and processes of textual reception.

Beyond its theological and historical implications, the wealth of variants discovered would provide a rich corpus for deepening linguistic studies, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of Ge'ez's historical phonology, morphology, and lexicon, and thus contributing to the language's evolutionary trajectory. Lastly, the edition would significantly inform liturgical studies by illuminating the specific textual forms employed in diverse liturgical contexts and regions, thereby enhancing our understanding of Ethiopian worship practices.

While this manuscript provides a theoretical framework and illustrative examples, the painstaking work of collating numerous actual manuscripts and preparing the full critical apparatus remains a monumental task. This conceptual edition serves as a call to action, emphasizing the critical need for dedicated scholarly effort to realize a comprehensive philological edition of 'Arbā'tu'Ensēsā. Such an undertaking would not only enrich Ethiopic studies but also contribute significantly to the global understanding of Christian textual traditions and the vibrant intellectual heritage of Ethiopia.

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